

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A RED SISTER.

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CHAPTER VII.

ALTHOUGH there was but little of the poet in Herrick's composition, assuredly he rode forth that afternoon through Summerhill Park gates into a very ideal world.

No common object but his eye
At once involved with alien glow
His own soul's iris-bow.

In other words, Lois's simple, unselfish love for him, which her hesitating attempts at self-sacrifice revealed, had awakened so deep a joy in his heart that for the moment the commonplace stretch of country he traversed was transformed into paradise. Surely never before did afternoon sun spread abroad so golden a glamour; never before had the rough Yorkshire air seemed so laden with the sweetness of the hedgerows! The very echoes which his horse's leisurely hoofs woke in the dusty road appeared to have a music all their own in them, and to rise and fall to Lois's tender, halting phrases.

The echoes of another horse's hoofs clattering along the road at a tremendous pace was only too soon to take the music out of these.

Herrick speedily recognised the approaching rider as his own groom. As the man drew nearer he saw that he held a telegram in his hand.

"For you, sir," said the man, drawing rein. "My lady has opened it and told me to take it to Summerhill."

Herrick ran his eye over the message.

It was from his father at Wrexford, and ran thus:

"Serious explosion of fire-damp. Come over at once."

Herrick turned his horse's head at once towards the Wrexford road.

"Tell Lady Joan I'm off at once," he said. A second thought followed, a kindly one for the old grandfather, and he added: "Say also that I think it would be better not to mention this explosion in my grandfather's hearing; it would distress him terribly."

Old Mr. Gaskell, however, had, unfortunately, heard the sad news even before Herrick. The telegram containing it had, in Herrick's absence, been taken to Lady Joan as she sat in the old gentleman's room, and her exclamation of surprise, as she had read it, had apprised him of the fact.

Lady Joan, as soon as her husband had set off for Wrexford, had said to herself that, since it was expected of her, she had better at once pay her visit to her father-in-law's rooms and get it over as quickly as possible. It had been her habit all through her married life thus to do "what was expected of her," knowing well enough that if she once let herself break into rebellion, even in trifles, against the iron rule of these Gaskells, there was no knowing where that rebellion would end.

One thing, however, seemed to conspire with another to prevent the proposed visit to the old gentleman's quarters, and possibly the night might have found it unpaid if she had not received a somewhat urgent message from Parsons—old Mr. Gaskell's attendant—saying that he wished to see her at once. Parsons was a privileged person in the house, and had permission at any hour of the day or night to communi-

cate with any member of the family on matters connected with the old gentleman's comfort.

Parsons's message was a written one, and to it she had added a word on her own account to the effect that Mr. Gaskell seemed very weak that morning, and unable to rally from the fatigue of the day before.

Lady Joan with a sigh put on one side an essay she was writing with deep interest on "The Beautiful, as opposed to the Terrible, in Art," and bent her steps to her father-in-law's quarters.

These had been assigned to him on the sunniest side of the Castle, and consisted of a suite of seven rooms leading one into the other, and in addition communicating by a second door with a long, narrow corridor which ran off the big inner hall of the house. These seven rooms had been most elaborately and luxuriously furnished, and Lady Joan never passed through them without thinking what an absurd amount of time and thought and money had been lavished in their fittings and decorations. A bedroom, a dressing-room, a sitting-room, were of course necessities to the old man; but here in addition was a billiard-room in case he might want to watch a game of billiards, a library, a smoking-room, and a room set apart as a sort of museum for patents connected with the working of coal-mines. This last was a room in which the old gentleman specially delighted. As a rule it was his sitting-room; and here he generally received his guests and visitors. Nothing gave him greater pleasure than to spend an hour or so in describing to an attentive ear how this or that lamp, hanging in one of the glass cases which surrounded the room, worked, or in exhibiting the various specimens of local coal which, carefully labelled, were ranged upon shelves.

Lady Joan, as she passed through these handsome rooms, and let her eye wander around on their artistic accessories—pictures, statuary, embroideries—could not help contrasting them a little bitterly with the room in which her own grandfather had died, and which, although it rejoiced in relics and heirlooms of priceless worth from an antiquarian point of view, owned to a carpet literally threadbare, and curtains burnt to their woof with the sunshine of over a hundred years.

Parsons came forward to meet her in the old gentleman's sitting-room.

"He is in an easy-chair in his dressing-

room, my lady," she said. "He seems very weak to-day, and says he will get into bed soon."

The easy-chair had, by the old gentleman's orders, been wheeled into a sunny bow-window; and, although his eyes were watering with the blinding light, he persisted in remaining there, saying that the sunshine put warmth into his bones, and was more than food or medicine to him.

The sunshine lighted up pitilessly his wrinkled face, half-shut sunken eyes, and thin hands, as they rested one on either arm of the chair.

When he opened his eyes, however, a change so great, as almost to amount to a transformation, took place. The eyes were dark-blue like his son John's, and so clear and luminous, so keen and searching, that one look from them was enough to establish the fact that though ninety years of wear and tear had reduced his muscles to the weakness of a child's, his brain and his will remained strong as ever.

And sometimes another look, a look neither keen nor searching, would come into those clear blue eyes; a look of sudden thoughtfulness, so deep as to amount to sadness, and which, let her fight against the idea as she might, never failed to bring back to Lady Joan's mind her dear old grandfather's eyes when, as he lay on his death-bed, he had turned his face towards her and had said, "If life were to come over again, Joan—" and then his eyelids had drooped, and the sentence had remained unfinished.

Worn and aged though the old man looked in the bright sunshine, his voice was cheery and firm as ever, when, after acknowledging Lady Joan's greeting, he said :

"Joan, I want you to send over to Summerhill the first thing after breakfast to-morrow to fetch that pretty little girl who is to be Herrick's wife. I want her to come and talk to me."

Lady Joan started back aghast. Without word of warning, that would enable her to determine her course, to be met by such a request as this! For a moment she did not speak.

The old man did not seem to notice her surprise, and went on calmly and authoritatively as before.

"I don't want her to come to-day, because I'm not feeling quite myself this afternoon; but to-morrow, immediately after breakfast, send the dog-cart round and fetch her."

Lady Joan began to recover herself.

"Would it not be as well to wait a day or two?" she began, slowly.

It was at this moment that Parsons came forward, bringing the telegram for Herrick.

Lady Joan, not a little glad of the diversion, opened it at once. As her eye mastered its contents, she uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" said the old man, sharply, turning towards her.

Then Lady Joan had to tell him the sad news. He sank back in his chair, covering his eyes with one hand.

"Poor lads! poor lads!" he moaned.

Presently he withdrew his hand from his face, and letting his eyes for a moment rest full on Lady Joan's, said :

"Joan, if I had my time to come over again, I don't think I should thank Heaven for the finding of coal on my land."

Lady Joan turned sharply away. At the moment she almost hated the old man for the rush of painful memories those words and the look combined had brought back to her.

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY JOAN did not take the colliery disaster so much to heart as did old Mr. Gaskell. The mines at Wrexford were dangerous ones, and during her married life had been the scene of more than one dire calamity. No doubt it would give her husband a good deal of worry, and some positive hard work, since he took such an exaggerated view of his duties as master and employer. He, doubtless, would spend days at the mouth of the pit; would take a personal interest alike in the victims and their desolate families. For weeks to come, most likely, the only talk between him and Herrick, whenever they sat down to table together, would be of new methods of precaution to be taken in working the mines, varied, perhaps, by consultations as to how Widow This and her sons, or Widow That and her daughters, could be best provided for in life.

Personally, however, Lady Joan felt herself chiefly touched by the tiresomeness of the whole thing, a tiresomeness that was doubly accentuated by the fact that it had happened just at a moment when she wished to claim her husband's undivided attention to a matter of first importance—Herrick's ill-advised choice of a wife.

To tell the truth, when she thought over

old Mr. Gaskell's request that Lois White should be sent for to the Castle on the following day, the thought of the twenty or thirty poor colliers scorched or suffocated out of their lives, speedily faded from her mind.

The longer she dwelt on the old gentleman's request, the more irritated and bewildered she grew. If she refused to comply with it she had but little doubt that he would himself ring his bell, transmit his orders to the stable, and despatch a message to Summerhill; and she would be placed in the undignified position of being compelled to stand by and witness the doing of a thing towards which she had assumed an openly hostile attitude.

This request of his was, indeed, a danger signal not to be disregarded, for it meant, without doubt, that in her opposition to Herrick's folly, she would have to contend not only with Herrick, but also with Herrick's father and grandfather.

She sat far into the night thinking over these things, trying to face her difficulties, trying to answer the by no means easy question. What must be her first step in the very unequal battle she intended to fight? A game was often lost, she told herself, by a first false move. Now, would it be a false move, before doing anything else, to appeal to Herrick to show consideration to his mother's wishes in his choice of a wife?

A moment's thought answered this question with a very emphatic affirmative. Years ago, when Herrick was quite a boy, it had been borne into Lady Joan's mind in all sorts of trivial ways, that he had taken her measure, so to speak, by precisely the same standard by which his father and grandfather had judged her, and that her wishes and opinions carried with him as much or as little weight as they carried with them.

In this dilemma a bright thought came to her. Why not make her appeal in the first instance to the young girl who was supposed to be in love with Herrick, and professed, no doubt, to have his best interests at heart. A talk of five minutes with her on the morrow, before she could be shown in to old Mr. Gaskell, might convince her what those interests really were, and bring that love of hers to the test. Of Lois White Lady Joan knew so little that she could not even conjecture what might be the immediate results to such an appeal; but it was manifestly the thing that stood first in order to be done,

whatever else might have to be done afterwards.

The night was creeping away while Lady Joan was thus facing her anxieties and arranging her plans; two o'clock was chimed by the clock over her mantelpiece. The night was intensely hot; evidently a storm was threatening. Lady Joan, with her brain still teeming with thought, felt that sleep for another hour or two would be an impossibility. She recollects a book which she had been reading on the previous day—a collection of Elizabethan lyrics, one of which had seemed to set itself to music as she had read it. She thought she would fetch the book, which she had left in one of the drawing-rooms, and jot down the melody which had run in her head before she forgot it. It would clear her brain from painful thought, and perhaps enable her to get a little sound sleep before day dawned; so she lighted a small lamp, and went her way through the dark, silent house to the rooms below.

That faint stream of light which her lamp threw, now high, now low, lighted up a lavishness of wealth, a sumptuousness of beauty wherever it fell. Those pictures which hung upon the staircase walls she herself knew the value of, for her opinion had been asked in their choice and purchase. That little niche on the landing-place held an all-but priceless statuette, and there below in the hall stood a cabinet containing china, for which a Royal Duke had bid in vain at Christie's against the millionaire coal-owner; now the stream of light fell upon a dainty Venetian glass tazza which had been pinched and moulded into its beautiful form by fingers which loved their art; and anon it glinted upon—ah! what was that? Here Lady Joan with a shudder turned her head sharply away. She knew well enough that that photographic album, the mediæval silver cover of which caught and threw back the lamp-light, contained portraits of the older members of the Gaskell family in various stages of what she was pleased to call vulgarity—John's mother in a dress fearfully and wonderfully made; John's uncle in a coat of equally marvellous cut. What an odd medley of luxury and art, of vulgarity and refinement, the roof of the Castle covered, she thought, as she entered the drawing-room, and, holding high her lamp, looked around her for her volume of poems.

Something else instead of the little book

greeted her eye as she stood thus—"the counterfeit presentment" of her own tall stately figure in a pier-glass let into the opposite wall.

For the moment she started, and drew back. The mirror reached from floor to ceiling, and with the lamp held high as she was holding it, reflected not only every detail of her dress and figure, but also, with a cruel exactitude, every line, every feature of her dark, austere face, rendered possibly a shade more dark and austere than usually by the unpleasant train of thought in which she had been indulging.

This sudden apparition of herself struck a jarring note, and set her measuring not only the years that had passed, but the years that were to come.

Slowly, step by step, she drew nearer to the mirror and steadily looked herself full in the face.

Lady Joan's passage across the plain of Mars, as the ancients loved to call the middle period of life, had been easy and luxurious as wealth could make it; yet, assuredly, no hard-working bread-winner or brain-worker, could have owned to harder lines than those which marred the beautiful outline of her mouth and cut deeply across her low white brow. Making due allowance for her hair, which still retained its girlish hue, that rigid face of hers expressed, uncompromisingly, every one of her fifty years.

"Yes," she said, aloud, "that elderly woman is me—me—Joan Herrick that was, who thought she had so many young years at command that she could easily give a half-dozen or so to be spent amid plebeian surroundings for the sake of the decades of happiness that would follow. And, instead of a half-dozen years, you poor woman, you have had to give your decades, and the promised happiness has not arrived yet! Now, should a happier order of things come about to-morrow, who will give you back any one of those thirty years of yours spent in bondage?"

Lady Joan, possibly, might not have liked, even in that night silence, to have put into so many words that "the happier order of things," towards which her aspiration had pointed year by year, for the past thirty years, involved primarily the death of old Mr. Gaskell, who, to her fancy, kept afloat in the household notions born with him in his cottage farm. Yet this was the underecurrent of meaning her thoughts carried with them. With the old man, who kept alive the plebeian atmosphere of

the Castle, once out of the way, her own influence must become paramount, and other things would follow as a matter of course. The detestable colliery business would be given up; the money made in the North would be spent in the South; and Herrick, taking his right position among his mother's people, would be free to choose a well-born wife for himself.

Lady Joan turned sharply away from the mirror. "Make the most of the time that is left to you, Joan," that sombre, austere face seemed to say to her as a last word. "Soon the dark days will be on you, in which you will care little enough for anything, good or bad, that life can bring."

A slight sound of movement in the hall outside at this moment caught her ear, and brought her bitter thoughts to a halt.

What could it have been? A sound of rustling; a light footfall was it?

She went hastily out into the hall. Though an ill-made dress would set her shuddering, and a bit of crude colouring make her cover her eyes with her hand, yet she would have gone out into her own hall, at any hour of the day or night, and faced a dozen armed burglars or any other danger that might be there, for physical fear was unknown to her.

No sight so terrible, however, as armed burglar met her view as she peered hither and thither in the darkness; nothing more alarming than a slender, white-robed figure coming slowly, step by step, down the big staircase.

At first, Lady Joan did not recognise the face of this white-robed figure. As it approached, however, and the light from her lamp fell full upon it, she recognised the features of the girl, Lucy Harwood, whom she had in the morning engaged as her maid. She was dressed in her white night-gown; this, together with her slow, dreamy movements, proclaimed the fact that she was walking in her sleep.

Lady Joan advanced towards her as she touched the lowest stair. Slowly and dreamily the girl came along the hall, feeling the wall with one hand as a blind person might, and the other outstretched in vacancy. Her face was slightly upturned, her eyes wide open and stonily fixed. There was a look of pain upon her face which seemed to suggest that the errand on which she was bent was a sad one.

"Where? Where? Where in the world?" Lady Joan heard her say slowly and sadly as she came along.

Without thinking much of what she was doing, Lady Joan laid her hand on the shoulder of the girl, who started violently and awoke. Then she burst into a flood of tears, and clasping her hands together, cried:

"Oh, where am I? What have I done?"

Lady Joan's quiet manner somewhat reassured her.

"You had better take my lamp and go back to your room," she said; "and tomorrow I should like you to see a doctor. No," she added, as the girl began to protest, "I can find my way upstairs easily enough in the dark; but you, as a stranger, would lose yourself in this big house without a light."

And as Lucy departed, looking white and frightened, Lady Joan found herself wondering, with a degree of interest that surprised herself, what was the mystery this apparently commonplace life held.

LOVE AND ITS LETTERS.

IT is with very mixed and indefinable sensations that one discovers in one's desks and drawers, and reads once more the love-letters that one received, and also—alas!—sent, ten or twenty years ago: tender "firstlings of the heart," as they may well be called.

Perhaps we sigh over the former; and it is odd if, spite of all our training in the midst of the buffettings of the world, we can read the latter with absolute composure. Certainly, if we have been so foolish as to cherish these records of our own levity and humiliation, as if they were reverend relics, we deserve just as much annoyance as the reperusal of them is likely to give us.

Here is one of these precious trifles. It is one of the received, not the sent:

"DEAR PETER,—How lovely of you to buy me such a nice book for my birthday! We are going to make our hay this afternoon. Gwen says we are all to help; and I know I mean to. I hope the men won't drink as much as they did last time; it was horrid, you know. We begin to make it at two o'clock. Will you lend me the wooden rake you used last year? We have not got one half as nice.

"I am your affectionate friend,

"BELLA."

This tiny epistle—it is a bilious yellow now, thanks to the objectionable touch of

old Time's ghostly fingers—is bound square with a piece of faded blue ribbon. I remember perfectly the history of that bit of ribbon. It was during the haymaking, in which I did not fail to take my share. We made but little use of our rakes. It was better fun to roll and smother each other in the hay. This being so, what more natural than that I should pay my respects to pretty little Bella with an armful of the grass? But, of course, I did not mean to knock her down and make her cry, and tear her dress, which was new, in honour of her birthday. That, however, is what I contrived to do; and she said, between her sobs, that she would never speak to me again, or forgive me. From that day forward, indeed, she was really somewhat less to me than the Bella of the past—I had never seen her cry, and get into such an extravagant passion. There was only one consolation for me. In the course of the fatal romp, I had torn her dress, so that when we stood up, panting, a bit of her blue ribbon stayed clutched in my right hand. "I won't take it—I won't," she protested, angrily, when I offered her the fragment. I am afraid she said this only that I might the more readily come under condemnation as the cause of her dishevelment. But I just put it in my pocket and kept it, and some years afterwards, for the association's sake, used it to tie round the above letter.

My pretty little Bella of those days is now the mother of five children. I regret to say she has not even had the grace to ask me to stand sponsor to a single one of them. It is as if, in the words of Shakespeare, she had said within herself, "Let me wring your heart, so that you may ever remember what you did once, and what you have lost in losing me."

To be sure, these very early letters are trivial things; of no more real consequence than a child's pout. It is just a little more serious when one is in the middle of one's teens. I speak as a man. With girls, probably this spot of time in the record of their lives is the era of the most cherished of their soul's romances.

But even as a boy, verging upon adolescence, one is not, according to the tradition of our land, likely to be very effusive in the display of one's heart. It is not the vogue with us at any time; still less in an epoch of life when we are cruelly pestered by irreconcilable problems. Are we to continue to regard all girls with the

self-satisfied contempt of the last few years, or are we to yield to the strange inclination which would have us confess that their very strength lies in their weakness, and that by some mysterious means it is our bounden duty to show a more genial interest in them than we have of late manifested?

If we take kindly to the latter alternative, and make the astounding discovery of feminine beauty, it is probable we are in for a grave attack of calf-love—one of the most educative, and yet troublesome experiences of a lifetime.

The other day, I called upon one of the ladies who, a certain number of years ago, inspired me with a passion of this kind, which, in its effects, put me in extreme doubt whether life was a burden worth bearing unless I could be assured she would share the load with me. For my part, I am glad to realise that I feel as young now as I felt then, and that I am certainly more wise and happy. This lady, too, is a matron now, with the cares of a household upon her broad shoulders. The light of love has long fled from her eyes. She is an excellent manageress, I am told, and wont to be obeyed by every one who comes within the sound of her tongue. Her children are the best-behaved children to be found anywhere. They would not say "boo" to a goose unless their mamma gave them special license to take such a liberty. And her husband—worthy man—spends his evenings at home; or, if by chance he tarries late at the house of another, he is always restless and impatient. He has a deep horizontal wrinkle on his forehead for each one of his children, and one more-appalling wrinkle, which is supposed to be a symbol of his marriage bond. The sweet fetters of domesticity are riveted hard upon him.

Well, for two years, this lady, when she was a girl, was seldom out of my thoughts. I danced with her, and walked and boasted with her, now and then rode with her (I have kissed her foot ere setting it in the happy stirrup), praised her poetry, and fancied she sang well enough for the choir of heaven itself. If I could see but the top of her head in church of a Sunday, it was enough. I would then go through the service and endure the sermon in an edifying frame of mind. I lived towards her, not doubting that, when the time came, I should be able to draw her damask cheek towards mine, and offer her my hand and life together. We had talked of

love till it had become as much a commonplace as the weather. Meanwhile, however, others caught sight of her. She was no matriculated flirt, but she had most womanly instincts. It was only natural, therefore, that she should not allow me to monopolise her sweet looks and ardent, innocent phrases. In short, her beauty led others, as well as myself, "by a single hair;" and the upshot was that, when I had enjoyed the climate of my foolish Paradise for a couple of years, a traitorous friend out-argued me, and stole her away. Here is her letter on the subject. I do not know for certain what the dents upon the paper stand for. They look as if some one had trodden upon the letter with a hobnailed boot. It may have been that I do not choose to remember. She, however, never wore boots of a size to do such mischief; nor was she the girl to send me a letter thus mutilated.

"**MY DEAR PETER,**—You will, I feel sure, be pleased to have any important news about me from myself—direct, instead of from the lips of others. We have known each other so long that we need not stand on ceremony with each other, need we? Life is strange, Peter, is it not? I should never, a year ago, have expected what took place yesterday, because, as you know, I did not then have the high opinion of him that I certainly now have.

"You will guess, perhaps, that I mean Graham Chester. He is the dearest fellow in the world to me now; and I love him the more, Peter, because I know he is your friend, and he has told me that there is no man he values more than you. I hope, therefore, our marriage won't make us forgetful (or rather 'unmindful,' since I shall never forget you) of each other. I may say that, I think. I would not for the world, do anything to make Graham jealous; indeed, I do not feel like doing it. Still, it would hurt me very much if I thought that by marrying him (in three months—lunar ones—from to-day) I was to lose your friendship. Let us always esteem each other, dear Peter, and so believe me,

"Very sincerely yours,
"JANETTE ARCH."

I do not know that there is a word of originality in this letter. For this reason, it here serves my purpose completely. It is a letter of a type. The girl has amused herself until she is a fully matured woman. She has at length drawn a husband, but she is anxious—and why should she not

be?—not therefore to lose a friend. She is not outrageously self-considering. One is urged of nature to try and get as much out of life as life will give us. Nevertheless, one does not like to receive such letters as this from Janette Arch. I suppose we did continue to be friends for awhile in an indifferent sort of way. But she had lacerated my heart a little, pricked the bubble I had blown, sent the walls of the castle of hope I had built high tumbling in upon each other; and I could not forget it. However, I am far from bearing her any ill-will now. The other day, indeed, I could not help pitying her in a measure; she looked so worn and despotic, and trod the earth with so ponderous and hard a step—in short, was so unlike the graceful, bewitching girl whose picture I still carry in my mind's treasury.

Men and women being naturally prone, when strongly tempted, to dissemble, it cannot be said, as an infallible rule, that the love is as the love-letter. It ought to be, but it is not. The epistle may be the work of one passionate, irresponsible minute. Our sentiments may give it the lie as soon as it is sent. Reason has then fair cause to put on sackcloth, and perhaps she will be called upon to repent in public before the indignity of an action at law. Impulse, then, has the laugh all to itself, and it is in vain that its victims wriggle and groan from the dilemma to which it has brought them.

Think of those cruel reprobates who have not scrupled to stimulate the dearest chords in a woman's heart under false pretences. It is no excuse for such men to plead in self-justification that they themselves have at one time or another been deceived by a woman. One person's wrong is never another person's right. The writer once met a foolish girl, whose history is a curious reflection of this. She jilted a promising husband for no apparent reason. Asked what had induced her to behave so oddly, what, think you, was her reply? A year or two previously, she had been on the like tender footing with another young man, who had cried off when it appeared that they had nothing to do but agree as to their wedding-day. The girl had her revenge upon the sex by treating her next lover as her former lover had treated her. This was no very sensible proceeding. But the action of those who designedly heap up endearing terms and phrases in what may, by courtesy alone, be called a love-letter, and whose hearts

all the while are cold and methodical, are as barbarous as this girl was foolish.

Goethe, in his autobiography, tells us of such a man. The Count de Stadion, Prime Minister to the Elector of Mayence, used to employ his secretary, a young man, in the composition, day after day, of a number of love-letters of the most perfervid kind. When his day's official work was at an end, the minister cast his eyes over these fanciful productions; chose one that seemed to him sufficiently impassioned, copied it, and despatched it to a certain lady, for whom he had great regard. It was fair neither towards the lady, nor the youth, whose ingenuousness would be thus corrupted.

Byron, we are told, was wont, in a similar way, to express his admiration for the many ladies whose bright eyes subdued him.

Mirabeau is notoriously in the same case. When writing to this charmer or that, he would copy whole pages from sundry periodicals of the day. "Listen, my beloved," he would begin, "whilst I pour my entire soul into thy bosom;" and such intimate confidence was a literal transcript from the "Mercre de France," or a new novel!

The love-letter is not, therefore, always a true mirror of the love.

Yet, as a rule, it certainly is. From this view, read once more the little Bella's notelet from the hay-field. Perhaps I err in regarding this as a love-letter. I think I do not, however. The instinct of her sex was in her when she wrote it; and it was just as effusive as she knew how, at her age, to make it. But the love of which it was the expression, what of that? It was a gross and meagre love, built upon a picture-book that cost sixpence. Ten or fifteen years later I have reason to suppose that she wrote in the following strain to a certain youth of her admiration:

"MY DARLING TOM.—Oh, if you only knew what a difference it makes to the brightness of the day when I see you or see you not, you would never, never, dearest Tom, fail to come and spend an hour or two with us in the evening. I know, of course, that you are busy, dear ; a doctor's profession is a horribly busy one. Still, if even it were only to feel mamma's pulse, it would be so sweet of you to come. Poor papa is not at all well ; he thinks he is going to have another attack of gout. I was so very disappointed that we did not meet you by the river yesterday evening. Mary and I were there from six o'clock

until seven, and we would have continued our lovely promenade up and down if there had not been such a disagreeable mist, which made Mary cough. Tom, dear, I wonder if you love me half as much as I think I love you. I don't know, I'm sure. Mamma says it's just possible, and only just. But this I know, that if anything were to happen to you, I should die out of the world ; it would be so blank and good for nothing, without you. Do come to-night, there's a dear, good boy.

"Your ever-fond little chicken,
"Bella."

"P.S.—Papa says he presumes I am writing to you, and he wonders if he might allow himself two glasses—only two—of the 1870 port, once in twenty-four hours."

It is the same Bella, you see ; somewhat developed, that is all. She is unwilling—and I do not blame her—to miss any of the small but very genuine pleasures which seem incident to her position in the world as the affianced bride of young Tom Physic ; and she is quite equal to the art of such casual suggestions as may make her lover call at her home a little oftener ; even as in the old days, when she was only a yard high, she lured me into her presence under the thin presence of a desire for a rake.

Emerson has said, somewhere, that our intellectual and active powers increase with our affection. To me this statement is not altogether credible. At least, it is not confirmed by the quality of such love-letters as the world is entertained with, through the medium of the Law Courts; nor is it confirmed by one's own love-letters. Perhaps I, as a bachelor, am a little prejudiced, but I cannot help thinking, in opposition to Emerson, that the intellect is, more often than not, held in abeyance when the heart takes up the pen to indite the familiar tale of its yearnings.

A FOOTBALL MATCH

It was Saturday morning; the busy city was even busier than usual, by reason of everybody's anxiety to finish and get away in good time for the afternoon's holiday. At such a time the sight of strangers, in number more or less, whether Arabs, Turks, Muscovites, or Chinese, would attract hardly a passing glance; and as for a few country people of the native brand, what is there to cause surprise at their presence?

in the centre of their own metropolis? But on this particular morning it was not a question of a few country people. There were hundreds of them, a curious, thorny, knotted, hard-featured kind of a crowd, in strange contrast to the smooth and supple Londoner, all whose angles have been worn away by continuous attrition. As their appearance, so their speech. It was English, to be sure, but not such as "she is spoke" within hearing of Bow Bells.

Roaming about here and there, the invading hosts broke up into small, irregular bands, loitering and gazing about, but still keeping together in a kind of loose formation. They might be staring up at the Monument, or admiring the bulk of St. Paul's, or peering over the parapet of London Bridge; but withal they had rather the appearance of people killing time, than engaged in a regular plan of sightseeing. They wore badges, too, in their hats and caps, tickets of light blue and gold, and favours of blue and white on the lappets of their coats. The usually insouciant London clerk was a little mystified at the sight. The light blue favours suggested the recent boat-race; and when it was seen that the gold lettering thereon formed the legend: "Play up, Wednesday!" or some other allusion to that particular day of the week—the University race having been rowed on the Wednesday previous—the surmise that these were belated boat-race visitors became almost certainty.

But when the leader of one of these invading bands was accosted and asked if he and his friends had been roving about London ever since Wednesday's boat-race, an answer was given with fine natural scorn, and in good broad Yorkshire:

"Nay, nay, wee know naught about bowt-race. We're Sheffield blades, my lad, and Wensday's our cloob. Aye, we've come for the footba' match. Play up, Wensday! Eh'oop!"

There was no mistaking the enthusiasm of these Yorkshire lads. They had started from Sheffield at five o'clock in the morning, several thousands of them, packed in four or five special trains. Their ultimate destination was Kennington Oval, where the final tie for the Association Cup was to be decided—the competing clubs being the "Sheffield Wednesday" and the Blackburn Rovers. Thus there was a kind of emulation as of two rival peoples, Yorkshire being pitted against Lancaster, as in the old Wars of the Roses. But in this case

it was a contest, the interest in which penetrated the whole social fabric. For the greater part of our country visitors were working men—grinders, riveters, polishers, having something to do, anyhow, with the great hardware industries of their native town; but all as enthusiastic about football play as any public schoolboy.

All this shows the vast popularity of a game that, half a century ago, was almost extinct. But for the public schools, and especially Rugby, where the game was still followed and cherished, football might have disappeared altogether from the roll of British sports and pastimes. It had been a famous popular game of old, played on village greens and breezy commons, parish against parish, guild against guild, or town against country—the goal, the old church porch, or perhaps the portico of the town-hall. In such a contest, young and old would take a part, and emulation and local patriotism thoroughly roused, the game might sometimes end in a general free fight, and desperate riot, involving broken heads and limbs, and even fatal casualties. Even of modern football, with its regular teams of players, working under well-settled rules, it can hardly be said that such rough encounters are altogether unknown. The contest is too sharp and violent to be always conducted with good temper. Even now, angry passions will rise, just as they did when Edmund Waller wrote:

As when a sort of lusty shepherds try
Their force at football; care of victory
Makes them salute so rudely, breast to breast,
That their encounter seems too rough for jest.

And the backers, supporters, and partisans of the rival sides are sure to enter into the spirit of the struggle with as much warmth as the players themselves, so that a general row and free fight are not unknown as the termination of a hardly-contested football match, especially in the northern regions of England, where local jealousies are perhaps stronger, and the crowds assembled of a rougher character than in the southern district. But such disturbances, if not unknown, are of an exceptional character; and as football is putting off any rough-and-tumble character it once possessed, and taking its place as a scientific game, requiring regular training and constant practice in its professors, it is likely that the disorderly element in it will soon be eradicated.

A certain risk of personal injury must always attach to such a vigorous game as

football, as it does, indeed, to almost every athletic exercise. A local poet, who celebrated a grand football match that was fought between two Derbyshire parishes early in the present century, half-seriously enumerates the parson and the doctor, as interested spectators of the fray :

The Parson purposed, for their sake,
A funeral sermon for to make,
If any one was slain.
And if one chanced to break his neck,
The Doctor's ready at a beck
To pull it in again.

But in those days, perhaps, the danger was increased by the fact that the players were often of highly-matured age, and, consequently, brittle frames. In the great match just spoken of, the leader of one side, Roebuck, is described as being just over thirty years ; but the opposing captain, Little David, has seen sixty-three winters pass over his head, and can boast of half a century's football play. But our present race of players have not had time to grow old. For it is only within the last twenty years that the game has assumed its present proportions.

One great cause of the success of football, as a sport, is its attractiveness for lookers on. In spite of wind or foul weather, any good football match is sure to attract its thousands of spectators all ready to "plank down" a shilling or more for a sight of their favourite game. Thus, taking up a sporting paper of the period, we may read of the England versus Scotland match, at Glasgow : "One thousand four hundred pounds taken at the gates." "Ten thousand spectators assembled at the Essex County Ground, at Leyton," to witness the final tie for the Charity Cup. "Twenty thousand people to see the final for the Yorkshire Cup, upon the Halifax ground." And we shall find in the same paper twenty or thirty contests chronicled of merely local interest, attended by numbers varying from nine thousand to nine hundred.

And, if you have once assisted as spectator at a good football match, you will cease to wonder at the attraction of the game for the general public. For it is essentially a lively, emotional game, full of moving incidents, and the ding-dong earnestness of the players and the personal risk which they incur, enhance the dramatic effect. It is the nearest approach that we can make, in these modern days, to the gladiatorial combats of old Rome.

The scene, we will say, is Kennington Oval, and the occasion, the final tie for the

Association Cup—reckoned the blue-ribbon of the football year by that section of players, anyhow, who recognise the Association as the fount and origin of the orthodox laws and practice of the game. Another considerable section, indeed, follow a different practice altogether, and belong to the Rugby Union, whose rules are those of the game as it is played at Rugby School, as well as at Marlbro' and Cheltenham. The Association, however, has the support of other public schools, including the famous old foundations of Eton, Harrow, and Winchester.

Which of the two games is the more ancient and honourable it is difficult to say ; the fundamental difference between them being that, by Association rules, kicking the ball is the only recognised mode of propulsion, catching the ball with the hands and carrying it being especially interdicted. To stop a cannon-ball with your head, it used to be said, was death according to the articles of war ; but there is no such hard and fast rule at football. You may stop it with any part of your person ; but to hold it involves a free kick to the opposite side. Now, in the Rugby game, holding and carrying the ball is an essential part ; the rules and procedure of the game are much more complicated, so that an uninitiated spectator watching the procedure is often puzzled to know what the players would be at. But the Association game is easily understood of the people.

The popularity of the Association game may be judged of, by the crowds which are making their way to the Oval this Saturday afternoon—not much afternoon yet, for the gates are open at one, and people are already streaming through the turnstiles. As for the London contingent, they are nearly all young men, and a great majority seem to be football players themselves, and wear the badges of their respective clubs, in one form or another. But our Sheffield friends are also here in full force. They are mostly working men, rugged, and hard as their native steel, and in this respect a great contrast to the London crowd, who are nearly all of what is considered superior social standing. There is a Lancashire crowd, too, no doubt, but these do not show their colours and their complexion so defiantly as do the Yorkshiremen. But it is strange to sit here in the middle of Cocaigne, and to listen to the rough Yorkshire burr, and the softer patois of Lancashire.

Anyhow, long before the time fixed for the kick-off, the enclosure railed off for the football play is surrounded by a dense array of spectators, rising in tiers head over head, ranged on the temporary wooden seats, or packed behind the railings. A fine sight it is when a bit of sulky sunshine finds its way through the threatening clouds, and brings into a weird kind of distinctness the whole scene—the green turf chalked out with the boundaries of the play, the goal posts at either end, like tall gallows erected for some monstrous hanging, the great multitudes round about, a chequered mass; here black and threatening, like a thunder-cloud, there showing white and gleaming, as a thousand faces are simultaneously turned to the light. Right opposite is the pavilion, that seedy old pavilion, which has witnessed so many famous cricket contests, which must remember the mighty men of old, and which yet has stories to tell of the performers of yesterday and to-day: how Grace once nearly knocked a hole in its clock face with a vigorous drive; or how Spofforth knocked over the wickets of the picked English players as though they had been ninepins. And the pavilion, too, is black as an ant-hill with its human throng; and the tall houses that look over the ground have their balconies full of spectators. The enormous gasometers that tower over the cricket-field bound the view, grim and silent reminders of the great wilderness of streets and houses that encloses this oasis of green turf.

Just at half-past three a narrow open space appears in the thronging ant-hill, and down the slope and bounding into the field come the Lancashire team: eleven fine fellows, all dressed in white, who are received with a roar of delighted recognition by their friends and supporters.

A stock of striplings strong of heart
Brought up from babes with beef and bread,
as some ballad writer describes the Lancashire lads of a good many centuries ago. And away they go, so many bounding brothers careering over the turf, kicking a ball before them in sheer lightness of heart.

"Lancashire, indeed; they're more than half Scotch," says a Sheffielder, angrily, on hearing some one cry, "Good old Lancashire."

But whether or no of entirely native origin, the Lancashire team is a fine one.

"My word, they'll eat up poor little Sheffield," cries a discriminating Yorkshireman. And, indeed, the Sheffield team

looked quite small when they presently made their appearance, arrayed in blue jackets, to receive a thundering salute of cheers from their numerous friends.

Then comes the ceremony of tossing a coin for choice of sides, and kick off. And now the rival teams are drawn up in battle array. There is the goal-keeper first, or last of all, whose duty it is to hold the fort—the space between the goal-posts—to the last extremity; and in front of him, the two backs, with the three half-backs on the alert in the wings and centre; and beyond them the fighting line, the five forward players, whose business it is to rush the ball into their opponents' quarters if they can, or to render a good account of the invaders if the ball is driven to their side.

A solemn moment it is when "The Major" appears, the president of the Association, carrying the leather-laced football in his arms, which he deposits carefully in the very centre of the ground. There it lies for a moment till its bearer is clear of the ground and gives the word to go, when a chosen player advances and sends it flying towards the opposite goal. It is soon stopped, footed or headed back, for you may butt the ball with your head if you can't reach it any other way. Then there is a wild intermingling of blue and white, a confused swaying crowd, driving now to one side and now to the other.

Not that the present contest is in itself remarkable; for it is soon to be seen that the Lancashire men are of too heavy metal for their opponents. As the prescient Yorkshireman foretold, his countrymen are eaten up; and as the best side has the best luck, the result is a very hollow affair. For three-quarters of an hour the play goes on all against the Sheffielders, who lose goal after goal; and then half-time is called, and there is five minutes' breathing time. During the pause certain sanguine Yorkists declare that the game may yet be saved; but such is not the general opinion among the hardy hardware men.

"Well, we've bin to Lunnon, anyhow, lads," remarks an elder, consolingly. But the bulk of his companions don't seem to think much of that. Indeed, some of their remarks about the great metropolis are rather disparaging. Here is the experience of a Sheffield knife-grinder in a walk through London streets, delivered in a tone of amused contempt, as if with the conviction that, anyhow, the knife-grinding arrangements of London were in a very backward condition.

"As we were coming along. 'See thee, George,' says William, 'whatever do you call yon?' And there were a German cocked up on a machine, grinding knives on one of them old-fashioned stones. 'Knock him over, William,' says I."

Here the shouts that greeted the return of the football teams drowned the conclusion of the narrative, which certainly showed a want of tolerance on the part of the speaker, and we were left in ignorance of the fate of his German confrère, who would certainly have been a knife-grinder with a story to tell if William had carried out his companion's instructions.

Happily the same intolerant spirit was not openly manifested during the football match to the account of the victors. The Yorkshiremen took their beating more philosophically than might have been expected; and although some said that there was "feighting" in the air, everything passed off in an orderly manner.

That the cup should go back to Lancashire was indeed almost a foregone conclusion. It has remained there for five or six consecutive years in the hands of one or another of the famous clubs of that pre-eminent county. Preston, Blackburn, and other Lancashire towns have a special reputation for football. The game, indeed, must have survived, in some form or other, in these districts, even through the dark ages, when it was practically extinct in other parts of the country. But, till the Football Association was founded in 1863, the game was played in a desultory kind of way; and, probably, no records are available for the historian who would trace the history of the game before that date.

Derbyshire, indeed, was famous for its football players up to within forty or fifty years of the present date, when the game was frosted and destroyed by the hostility of the ruling powers to such gatherings. At Chester, in early times, the football contest was an official and municipal function. According to old-established custom, the shoemakers of Chester delivered to the drapers yearly, at Shrovetide, "a ball of leather, called a foote ball," to play from the Common Hall. But as early as the year 1540, football was superseded by foot-races, which were held on the Roodee.

The shoemakers, indeed, where they formed a numerous body, seem to have been eager players at football. That was a grand match on the Borders, when the Suters of Selkirk challenged the Yarrow

men under Lord Home, and played them, on the Carterhaugh—the Shirra of Selkirk himself, the great Sir Walter Scott, being among the organisers of the contest. The game did not inspire Sir Walter with any spirited Border ballad, but the Ettrick Shepherd has surely something to say about it, and the following verse is part of a ballad composed on the occasion :

Has ne'er in a' this country been,
Sic shoulderin' and sic fa'in',
As happened but few weeks sinsyne
Here at the Christmas ba'in'.

Further north, Scone was famous for its local football matches, in which all the country-side took part, and which commenced at two p.m. and lasted till the sun went down. A current proverb, "A's fair at the Ba' o' Scone," testifies to the unscrupulous manner in which the game was fought out. At Inverness, again, the women of the district joined in the game; and through all the northern land, even to the utmost Thule, the game was enthusiastically played, till the beginning of the present century.

Nor was the game confined to Great Britain. In Normandy, and also in Brittany, local football matches were regularly played between parish and parish, with much energy and fierceness, customs that survived till the middle of the present century, though it would be difficult now to find any recollection of the game among the peasantry.

But the "renaissance" of football in our own country, and its marvellous development and popularity, is a fairly good answer to any croakers who may bewail the decadence of our British youth. For it is a game that calls for all the qualities that are valuable to the soldier and to the explorer—endurance, courage, tenacity of purpose, and a readiness to suffer all kinds of pain and trouble for the sake of victory—all these are not inconsiderable qualities; and if you add to them prudence, discipline, and good temper, you have gone far to build up the ideal character of a good football player.

IN THE FOLKS' WOOD.

A STORY IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

How shall I describe the days that followed; the magic saunterings in the Folks' Wood, or by the Folks' Mere—the golden light that cast a glamour over everything—the shy, illusive charm of my Titania?

At first, Miss Denison, with a keen watchfulness in her grey eyes, underlying in some intangible way her unfailing cordiality, was the constant companion of our walks and talks; but, by degrees, this watchfulness relaxed, and then came hours of blissful companionship that, even now, stir a dim yearning in my heart—despite the end.

What heroic platitudes—what noble sentiments—my inexperienced youth drew from the depths of its ignorance in those halcyon days, to win a smile from my silent nymph! I smile myself—and sigh—at the memory of those ardent commonplaces.

Sylvia listened, with a gentle word now and then, and with bright eyes glancing here and there about the woods, as if in search of something. She knew every turn of them, as if she had been a bird or a squirrel, and as instinctively. Of all their wealth of herb and flower, she knew scarce a name.

I remember asking her, once, the name of a little flower of purest blue, that mightily took my town-bred fancy.

"Fairy's eyes," she answered, readily.

Later on, when her aunt had joined us, I spoke of the little blossom by the name Sylvia had given it.

"Who calls it that?" asked Miss Denison, quickly, with a shadow on her face. "It is the blue speedwell."

"It was Miss Sylvia's name for it," I explained; "it struck me as very pretty and appropriate."

"It is time Sylvia gave up her childish names for things," began Miss Denison, gravely; but Sylvia slipped her hand through her aunt's arm, with a whispered, "Don't be cross, Aunt Rachel," that brought back the smile to the elder woman's face.

Another day I spoke to Sylvia of my first sight of her in the woods.

"Were you repeating poetry?" I asked, jestingly. "Did I disturb a recitation to the Fairy Court?"

She looked gravely at me.

"Not just that—" she began, and then stopped and smiled softly.

So, many days went by, and yet I had never spoken of love to her—had not even hinted at the feelings that kept me under her fairy spell. Many a time, alone in my room, my pulses leapt as I rehearsed scenes of avowal on my own part—scenes pregnant with passion and eloquence, and palpitating with hopes of the sweet blush

that was to give the shy assent I longed for. And yet, vivid as my conception of the first part of my programme was wont to be, somehow, it was just when I came to this shy assent, that all my diffidence returned in tenfold force. I could not think of my woodland nymph as won by mortal man. Some deity of the woods, some "lovely Acis" of immortal pastures—even some bewitched merman, like him whose forsaking has been sung in sweetest music—were fitting wooer of the "cold, strange eyes" of this Dryad; mere man, albeit in the form of dream-fed youth, seemed too rude a mate for her ethereal grace.

Yet the day came, and the hour.

One glorious evening in July, she and I were in the little glade where first I met her. We sat on the fallen tree, and there had been silence between us for a space.

Sylvia was seldom the first to break a silence, and my youthful eloquence was quenched in the delight of watching her slender hand as it caressed the lichenized bark of the prostrate trunk, and a tumultuous wonder if she would resent my taking the pretty hand in mine.

She sighed softly, and my heart gave a throb. It was the first sigh I had ever heard from her lips. A smile often, a bird-like little laugh more rarely, broke the habitual gentle quietness of her manner—which had no trace of depression or sadness in it; but I had never heard her sigh before.

The soft sound gave words to my desire.

"Sylvia," I said, while the beating of my heart well-nigh choked me, and all my rehearsed eloquence faded from my memory, "Sylvia—I love you—I loved you the first moment I saw you, here, on this very spot. Can you love me a little, dear—only a little?"

She looked straight before her into the depths of the wood, and the pure outline of her cheek showed no access of colour.

Timidly I took possession of the slender hand, as it strayed along the trunk. She did not withdraw it.

"Try to love me a little, dear; I love you so dearly—so dearly," I pleaded.

She turned her face towards me—the clear blue eyes as candid and untroubled as a child's.

"I do love you," she said simply, and looking straight into my eyes.

My Titania was won, and my wildest hopes fulfilled! I had "kissed Queen

Mab," and if the kiss brought a vague sense of incompleteness, and Queen Mab walked home with me through her native woods, hand-in-hand, but without any answering tremor to that which shook my pulses, was not all life before me to warm the heart of the woodland nymph into that of the perfect woman?

We walked, still hand-in-hand, into the parlour and Miss Denison's presence.

At sight of us she started and dropped her work, while her eyes read my face with intense enquiry.

"Aunt Rachel," I said, "Sylvia and I are—I have been telling Sylvia I love her; and she says she loves me—a little—too."

Miss Denison uttered a sharp exclamation, half sob, half laugh, and caught her niece in her arms, straining her to her breast, with a passion she seemed unable to control.

"My darling! my darling!" she cried, "I am so glad, so very glad!"

Then she turned to me, with an evident striving for calmness.

"I could not give her to any one I like—I trust—more," she said; "to any one I could better trust with her happiness."

She put her hand on my shoulder and kissed my forehead.

"My dear," she said, earnestly, "she shall make you happy. You shall never repent it. I pray Heaven——"

She checked herself, and began to speak more lightly and of other things.

We settled down after that, Sylvia's silence falling on her again, while my eyes were satisfied with feasting on her fragile beauty, and my heart sang peans because she was mine.

When the too-short evening was gone, and I was alone in my bed-chamber with a tumult of feelings in my bosom that would not let me think of sleep, I sat me down at my wide-open window and looked out upon the silent night.

The moon was at the full, climbing the heavens in all her majesty, and endowing the trees of the wood, and the distant waters of the great mere, with that magical, mysterious beauty of which she alone keeps the secret.

I had sat for more than an hour, drinking in the beauty without being aware of its details, when my eye was caught by the gleam of something white amongst the trees, to the right of the house. It was gone before I had time to look at it, and it had been so vague and formless that I decided it must have been a sudden glint

of the moon on the shining foliage—if not a delusion altogether.

But, whatever it was, it had broken the train of my thought, and I began to think of preparing for bed, when I heard the cautious opening of a door near mine I knew to be Miss Denison's; then the creeping of muffled footsteps on the stairs; the guarded loosing of the bolts of the hall-door; and then, watching intently from my window, I saw a dark figure, cloaked and hooded, but in which I instantly recognised my hostess, emerge upon the moonlit space, and glide swiftly into the shadow of the woods.

Something—some sickening apprehension—closed upon my heart like a spring. Instant conviction that here was a mystery—a mystery connected in some way with Sylvia—seized me, and even before the thought was formulated in my mind, I had slipped down the stairs and out of the door, and was in pursuit of the dark figure I had recognised.

Instinct, rather than any defined plan, guided me through the woods—ghostly and eerie now to my newly-awakened apprehensions of the mystery they must conceal—and past the mere, where the moon mirrored itself in the placid depths. As I paused at its side, the figure I was in pursuit of stood for a moment on its further edge, as if peering into its waters for something; then turned, and kept on its way into the deeper recesses of the wood.

I circled the mere and followed the well-remembered windings, until I was nearing the glade, where my first love-tale had been told a few hours earlier.

I was close upon it; I could even, through the trees, catch gleams of the moonlight sleeping on its sward, when from it came the sound of a lightly-trilled song, shattering with a thrilling horror the silence of the night, and freezing the blood in my veins.

I took a few steps forward, and looked upon the glade, and upon a sight that will always haunt my dreams.

The moon's rays as she rode high in the heavens, filled the little space with a silvery radiance, wherein, with floating hair and waving hands, with scraps of weird song intermingled with elfin laughter, a white-robed figure swayed in a kind of rhythmic dance, as if to music unheard by mortal ears.

I stood, stiff-stricken with the sense of unintelligible calamity, and the hooded figure I had followed stole out from the

opposite side of the glade, and approached the dancer.

"Sylvia, my darling!" she pleaded, in tones of agonised and imploring love, "come home with me; come home with Aunt Rachel, dear."

The girl laughed a tinkling, unearthly little laugh.

"They know now!" she said. "I've told them. I'll go back now!" She waved her hands once—twice. "Good night! good night!" she cried, and my strained ears caught faint, delusive echoes, as of elfin voices in answer.

Miss Denison's arm was wound firmly round the slim white figure as they crossed the little space. Her eyes fell on me where I stood amongst the trees, and there came into her face a look of hopeless anguish that hurts me to think of even now. There was something in her look, and in the way in which she drew her charge away from my direction, that told me she forbade discovery of my presence. I waited until the sound of the retreating footsteps was lost in the distance, and then followed in their track to the house, and regained my room, a prey to agitating and torturing thoughts I will not recall. Sleep was out of the question. I sat and watched the early summer dawn, thinking not at all, but letting the waves of feeling go over my head until I grew restless, and felt I must go out—not into that fatal wood, but somewhere into the open air.

Once more on that strange night I passed out of the hall-door, and finding my way into the straggling kitchen-garden at the back of the house, and away from the sight of the Folks' Wood, I strolled up and down its grass-grown paths in a vain endeavour to think consecutively of the night's events.

Presently the latch of the gate clicked, and I saw Miss Denison's tall figure approaching.

No smile greeted me now. On her worn face could be read a despairing sadness that made no effort at concealment. A dull, half-understood resentment against her had smouldered in my breast during the hours of my night watch; glimpses of something treacherous had caught here, there, on my mental consciousness, to lose force again for want of knowledge; but, at sight of her face, I am glad to remember that, even in my own misery, I found pity for hers.

She came close to me, but did not speak.

"How is—she?" I stammered at last.

"She is asleep," she said, in a dull, dead-sounding voice. "Old Martha is with her. I have come to say a few words to you before you go. Since you have seen my miserable secret with your own eyes—there is little to say. I don't ask you to forgive me. I have no defence to make. It is true—I would have sacrificed you—or any one—for her good. I plotted and planned for it; that was my only reason for wishing for a boarder. If you had proved unworthy, I should have kept her from you and looked for another—that's all."

"It was a little hard on me," I said, in a voice I could not keep quite steady.

Her face worked passionately.

"It was cruel; it was inhuman!" she cried. "Only, I love her so—only I believed—I hoped at least—that to know herself loved would awaken her own soul. That this—this folly—ah! let me face it at last! this delusion—this madness would pass away, and I might see her a happy wife and mother. My Sylvia—my beautiful Sylvia!"

Her voice broke with that pitiful cry, and the tears coursed down her thin cheeks.

I found some manliness then, and, taking her hand, drew her to a garden seat.

"Miss Denison," I said, quietly, "it is not I who should quarrel with you for your love for Sylvia, even though it has fallen hardly on me. I forgive you freely and fully for my share of the trouble."

She thanked me brokenly, and presently, in a calm tone, asked me to listen to the whole story, wherein I might, perhaps, find some sort of excuse for her sin against me.

"I had a younger brother—an only one," she began. "He was Sylvia's father. Oh, my poor Laurie! What years of misery seem to have gone by since you were my darling and my joy! But that's no matter! Well, this brother was my father's pride and delight. I was nothing to him in comparison. Laurie was to redeem our fallen fortunes; Laurie was to win every prize in life. Amongst others, his handsome face was to win the heiress whose money was sadly needed to repair our decay. I need not tell you the details of all the sad story. This is all that concerns you. In the heyday of his youth, with, as my father thought, the world at his feet, he fell in love and ran away with

a girl without a farthing—an orphan teacher in the village school. The day my father heard the news he swore a solemn oath that Laurie should never darken his doors again; and from that moment he has never spoken his name."

She paused and wrung her hands together; and the action told something of what this quietly-told story had cost her.

"Mr. Erskine," she went on, presently, very low, "they were married—I did not work to draw you into that disgrace, however else I have sinned against you. No tidings reached us—or me, rather—for it was only by stealth that I managed to let my brother know of his father's unalterable decision—for many months after the separation. Then, one day, one awful day, came news of my Laurie's death by drowning"—another pause, while her hands clutched at her breast—"and a week later, walking broken-hearted in the woods, I met the girl he had married—ill, hungry, and in rags—and she begged me, for my love of him, to give her shelter until—her child was born. There was then—it has been pulled down since—a poor, mean cottage in the very heart of the Folks' Wood. In secret, and with a quaking heart, I hid her there. I brought things from the house to make it habitable. I managed to procure doctor and nurse; and there—there amongst the trees, Sylvia was born, and her poor young mother died. When it was over, desperation made me bold, and I confessed all to my father. I suppose I was terrible in my anguish, for he consented at last to my taking the baby, Laurie's child, to bring up—although, as you have seen, he has never forgiven her her birth or her mother."

She paused—this time so long that I spoke. "Sylvia—" I began.

"Sylvia was the dearest, sweetest, loveliest of children"—her voice began to tremble—"but from the time her mind began to open I felt that she was unlike other children. As she grew older, her passion for the woods, for the tales of the fairies—oh, those fatal fairies!—that haunt them, grew with her. It seemed to suck out all other life or interest from her. She lives only in that. Ah! don't ask me, since my hopes are ended. And they were so high, only yesterday. No words can alter it or mend it! My little Sylvia—my Laurie's only child!"

That morning I left Folks' Field, and I have never seen it since.

At my request, Miss Denison kept me informed from time to time of her niece's state; for the thought of complete ignorance was unbearable to me.

Two years after that strange summer holiday, a letter—written with a kind of anguished resignation—told me that Sylvia Denison's fluttering soul had escaped its earthly bonds, and that the Folks' Wood was for ever deserted of the woodland nymph I had wooed beneath its shades.

But still, at moments, I follow that airy figure as it winds amongst the trees. I tell again my tale of love to her passionless fairy heart; and once more I feel my blood freeze as she dances her mystic dance to the sound of elfin song and laughter in the glade.

THE TRAIN-BANDS OF EDINBURGH.

EVERY year the Magistrates and Council of the ancient city of Edinburgh appoint from their number an official called the "Captain of Orange Colours," whose sole duty is to take charge, during his term of office, of an old tattered banner, a snuff-box, a tobacco-pipe and case, and a silver cup. These are the sole remaining insignia of the once famous Train-bands of the city, the memory of which has just been rescued from oblivion by the printing of their quaint records and minutes, at the order of the magistrates and under the supervision of the Town Clerk. These are worth looking at, as affording a curious picture of the municipal institutions of the past.

It is not easy for us, living in these days of admirable police organisation, fire brigades, and sanitary inspection—admirable, although some degrees yet from perfection—to realise that our forefathers had either to be their own guardians or submit to be robbed and maltreated. Edinburgh began, as long ago as 1580, to entrust to her burgesses the duty of defending the commonweal; for in that year the Train-bands were instituted. The Town Council nominated sixteen citizens—ten representing the merchants and six the crafts—to be captains of the sixteen companies of the Regiment of Burgesses. There was one lieutenant, one ensign, and two sergeants to each company, thus making a total of eighty officers, forty-eight of whom were commissioned and thirty-two non-commissioned. The Cap-

tains elected their own Commandant, or Moderator, for the year, and also nominated one of their number as clerk, to keep the accounts and records.

The city was divided into sixteen districts, each distinguished by a "colour," as, orange; whytte; blew; whyte and orange; green and reid; purple; blew and whyte; orange and green; grein and white; reid and yellow; yellow; reid and blew; orange and blew; reid and whyte; reid, whyte, and orange; and reid—to reproduce the quaint and erratic spelling of the records. Each district was known by its colours, and the captain of the district was the captain of such and such colours. Each company was, of course, recruited from the residents of its own district.

In 1607, this custom was discontinued, and a hired watch was employed; but the service does not seem to have been effective, or, perhaps, the expense was grudged, for, in 1625, the magistrates ordained by Act of Council, that the ancient method of watching by the burgesses and inhabitants should be resumed. Proclamation was made in the name of the King and Council, that every man should "Compeir as thai ar wairnit ilk man in his awin constable's pairt in the nether Tolbuth of the burgh, at nyne houres at nycht, to answer to their names, as thai sal be callit be the baillies or constable of his pairt, with sufficient armour, and not de-pairt therfra till fyve houres in the morning under the paine of ane unlau of fyve poundis, to be payit be the contravenar 'tories quoties,' and this ordour to begin uponne the 25th of October instant."

An Act of the following year refers to the foreign wars, to the possibility of invasion, and to the necessity of being prepared for defence. It appointed the whole inhabitants to be divided into eight companies of two hundred men each, to be regularly exercised and disciplined; and the officers of each company were required to personally visit the houses of the "whole men" of their company, to see that they were provided with arms, and to report defaulters to the magistrates. The big and strong men were ordered to carry a pike, and the smaller men, "a musket with bandalier and head-piece, lead, pouther, and match." A later ordinance orders the youths of the city to be formed into two companies—that of the Merchants to march in the van, and that of the Crafts in the rear, of the Train-bands.

Whether these ordinances were or were

not fully carried out, there is no means of knowing, for the minutes of the Society of Captains only extend back to 1647. But it would appear that in 1645, the Town Council remodelled the whole system of the Train-bands, and defined the bounds of each company. They appointed the Captains, and left these officers to select their own subalterns.

A town-guard was also organised, consisting of sixty men, a lieutenant, two sergeants, and three corporals. This company was under pay, was required to be at the order of the magistrates night or day, and figured at all public functions.

In 1663, the Captains of the Train-bands formed themselves into a Society, and obtained a constitution from the Town Council. It enabled them to "meet together at such convenient times and places as they might appoint, for contriving and appointing things necessary and convenient for securing decent order among themselves in their several companies, whatever should be enacted by the major part present at every such meeting—nine being always a quorum—being regarded as the conclusion and act of the whole." They were also empowered to exact penalties and fines on their own order, and to require the obedience of all the inferior officers to their edicts.

This Society, which began as a sort of Committee of Public Safety, seems to have gradually merged into a convivial club.

It began well, however, and took over the control of such city constables as there were. The watch was regularly kept by the several companies, each in its own district and under its own Captain, but with the opportunity of a relief occasionally by borrowing a guard from a neighbouring company.

That the citizens did not like the duty, and shirked it whenever they could, is evident from successive ordinances. Thus, in 1669, there is an Act which sets forth that the neglect of the citizens to keep guard has led to the breaking open of shops and houses, and the disquietude of the city; and orders that thenceforth "all the neighbours" shall punctually attend their respective Captain's guard, and watch the whole time appointed to them, under the penalty of three pounds Scots, and further punishment at the discretion of the Council.

This may have served for a time; but laxity again set in, and in 1676 there is another solemn Act reprobating the citizens for absenting themselves from

guard without even providing substitutes, and ordaining that whenever the Guard should not turn out in sufficient force to protect the city, the Captain on duty should be held responsible for the fines on the absentees. Again and again similar enactments are repeated, until the Society of Captains, in despair, requested the Council to appoint a Town-Major or Inquisitor of the Watch Rolls, whose duty was to go the round of the Guard, take note of the absentees, pay into the guardbox six shillings Scots for each absentee, and then pursue each for eighteen shillings for his own relief and payment. With a prospect of two hundred per cent. profit on each fine, it is not likely that this official would allow any skulker to escape; so we may assume that either the Guard was thereafter well kept, or that the Town Major had a very lucrative post.

But if without fear, the Captains themselves were not without reproach, as we gather from such minutes as this :

" Edinr. 14th Decr, 1676. The which day, the City Captaines, being mett and considering the many and great violations of the law of God, and the laws of this kingdom, established by his Majestie and his royll predecessors, against cursing and swearing, which is prohibit by severall Acts of Parlt. under diverse penalties, did therefor unanimouslie statut and ordaine that in case ane of our number shall curse, swear, or use any unhandsome expressions at any of our meetings, he who so doeth shall be obliegid to pay in to our clerke, sex shillings Scots, 'toties quoties' . . . The sd. day it was furder ordained, that in case that any shall interrupt any of our number when he is tabled, before he be heard, he shall be obliegid to pay into our clerke four shillings Scots, 'toties quoties.' "

This ordinance, however, does not seem to have permanently abolished "unhandsome expressions," for we find similar minutes at intervals of several years. The following points to something very "unhandsome" indeed :

" The Capts. mett, and taking to ther consideration the uncomeliness of disrespectful langua, one to another in generall, but more in particular the giveing of a lie, which in reason may procure quarrels among them who retains a principlall of honour; and to witness their disleik thereto, it is agreed, whoever gives another the lie shall be fined to the value of ten shillings sterlign, or any remarkeable deigned reflections, to suffer a vote of the

Society, as the heynousness or otherwyse as the crime may deserve."

The language here is confused, but the design is obviously praiseworthy. So also is it in the following, which is so exceedingly characteristic of the time, place, and people, that we transcribe it in full. Evidently, there had been much soul-searching before this entry :

" Edr, the fourth day of December, one thousand, seven hundred and five years.

" The which day the Society of Captains being convened in the old Councill House"—usually they met at some tavern, or at "the quarters" of some brother officer, a vintner—"considering the great growth of immoralities within this city and suburbs, and the fearfull rebukes of God, by a dreadful fire in the Parliament Close, Kirkheugh and Cowgate, which hapned about midnight upon the third day of Feberuary 1700 years, and which it is recorded in the Councill Books, with their Christiane sentiments theranent, upon the 24th of April thereafter. And, also, remebering that terrible fire, which hapned in the north side of the Landmercatt about midday upon the 28th day of October, 1701 years, wherein severall men, women and children were consumed in the flames, and lost by the fall of ruinous walls. And, furder, considering that most tremendous and terrible blowing up of gunpowder in Leith, upon the 3d day of Jullly, 1702 years, wherein sundree persons were lost, and wonderfull ruines made in the place. And likewise reflecting upon many other tokens of God's wrath, lately come upon us, and what wee are more and more threatened with, being moved with the zeall of God, and the tyes He heath laid upon us, and that wee have taken upon ourselvess to appear for Him in our severall station, doe, in the Lord's strength, resolve to be more watchfull over our hearts and wayes than formerly, and each of us in our severall capacities to reprove vice with that due zeall and prudence as we shall have occasion, and to endeavour to promote the rigorous execution of those good laws, made for suppressing of vice and punishing of the vicious. And the Society appoints this their solemn resolution to be recorded, and their clarke to read, or move the reading heirof in the Society everie first meeting after Whitsonday and Martinnes yearly, as a lasting and humbling memoriall of the said three dreadfull fyres, and that under the penalty of twenty merks, Scots, 'toties quoties.' "

How long this wholesome feeling lasted, and whether or not this solemn record was read as ordained in future years, the minutes do not show.

Due record is made of the manner in which the burgesses are to be informed that their turn for mounting guard has come. The Captain sent his drum throughout the whole of his bounds, between six and seven o'clock in the morning in the summer time, and shortly after daybreak in winter time. Pausing at the head of each "close" or "wynd," the officer proclaimed the precise hour for "attending the colours," and named those whose turn was due. Just before the appointed hour, the drum was sent round again by way of reminder; and one can well imagine that its rattle was anathematised freely enough to have enriched the Exchequer, had there been any one to pick up the "unhandsome expressions" and the consequent fines. The hour of mounting guard is repeatedly altered on the score of inconvenience, but no alteration seems to have made the duty agreeable to the worthy burgesses, who had to turn out in the cold and dark and wind.

They do not seem to have even had the compensating glory of wearing a uniform; at any rate, we find no mention of uniform in these records, and only a casual reference, at a later date, to the full-dress to be worn by the Captains at some civic function. This was ordered to be "a dark blue coat, plain yellow buttons, white vest, nankeen breeches, and white silk stockings; each Captain having appended to his left breast ribbons made in the form of a rose, denoting each of their colours."

When a new Captain, or doctor, or chaplain was appointed, there was a great gathering for what was called the "brothering" of the new comrade. In 1684, the new man had to pay the clerk seven pounds sterling towards the expenses. The sum varied from time to time; but now and again there was an enactment to check and reduce the growing expenditure at the convivial meetings. By one minute it is ordered that no Captain shall be pressed to drink what he does not want, either as to quantity or quality. By another it is decreed that whoever chooses to remain in the tavern after the Moderator or Commandant has retired, must pay his own charges. The expenses of the entertainments were, otherwise, furnished out of the common fund, made up of the "brothering" fees, and the constant small fines for petty offences.

Here is a characteristic entry of a "brothering":

"Edinburgh, January 3, 1687. The which day ye Society of Captains being in the evening met and conveened, in Captain Patrick Steele his house, Captn. Edward Cunningham and Captn. Walter Dermont, after having taken ye usual oaths and engadgements, were, with ye accustomed solemnityes and ceremonies, received into ye Brotherhood, and declared members of ye said society. Each of the said intrant captains havinge conform to aane act payd in to ye Clerk seven pounds sterlinc, which ye Society appointed their Clerk to record."

What were "the accustomed solemnityes and ceremonies" we gather, in part, from later entries, such as this: The entrant "stood upon ane carpet in the middle of the roome with the whole Society surrounding him, with their swords drauen, and after performing of some of the usuall seremonies he kneeled upon his right knee and the whole Society crossed their swords upon his head, and soe he was declared a member of the Society, and ordered that their clerk should record the saman."

Still, it must be confessed, that one would like to know more about the "usuall seremonies" which are repeatedly mentioned, but never further described.

What we do gather, however, is that there was either a dinner or a supper after the "seremonies," and a big drink, although the minutes are always careful to record that the company, at a timeous hour, "marched to their respective quarters in good order and with proper decorum."

One should imagine that there must have been a little poetic license in such a record after the festivity recorded in the following tavern bill, if it included a company of only sixteen Captains:

Supper	£6 4 6
46 bottles port, 3s. 9d.	8 12 6
19 bottles sherry, 4s.	3 16 0
Rum punch	2 13 6
Whisky tody	0 2 6
Brandy and gin	0 9 6
Porter	0 7 6
Negus	0 5 6
Bread and beer	0 8 6
Biscuit, prawns, etc.	0 7 9
Breakage	0 8 0
Fruits, etc.	0 19 4
Tea and coffee	0 12 0
Cadies and paper	0 3 6
Rum tody, 6s.	0 6 0
	<hr/>
Waiters.....	£25 16 7
	1 1 0
	<hr/>
	£26 17 7

The item for breakage is suggestive; but then we must remember that the custom of the time was to shatter the glass after certain toasts.

Here is a more modest bill; but still exhibiting a wonderful capacity for liquor among the officers, in comparison with the charge for solids :

Supper	£1 3 0
Fifty-one bottles of punch	2 11 0
Seven bottles of claret	0 14 0
More, one do.	0 2 6
12 bottles of porter.	0 3 0
Beer and cadies	0 2 3
Ye officer	0 1 0
Glasses	0 1 6
	£4 18 3
Servants	0 2 0
	£5 0 3

Edinburgh, 11 August, 1752.

Great sticklers for discipline and etiquette were these gallant Captains in their glory. Thus, on one occasion, they minute :

"The Societie of Captains being convened, they did unanimously statute and ordain that every one of their number, together with their subalterns, should be obliged to attend the Lord Provost and Town Councill upon all emergent occasions, and in all cases of imminent danger, either to the City or inhabitants, by fire, tumultuous mobbs, rabbles or uproars, and that they shall lay outt themselves jointly for maintaining the peace and quietness of the good town, to the outmost of their power, and ordered the same to be recorded, as a publick law of the Society, that all may know their duty in the premisses."

Shortly after this assertion of their rights as public guardians and ordainers of "publick law," the Captains had to submit a long and solemn "Representation" to the Town Provost and Magistrates concerning the insubordination of a certain "Ensigne" who refused or neglected to obey the orders of a Captain acting in place of his own superior, absent on leave. The "Levetenant" seems to have been no better, for, it is sad to read, "being desired by the Captain to sett out the sentries, he and the ensigne, in a mutinous manner, retired and called the rolls, and the Captain desiring both subalterns to sett the sentries upon the Tolbuth, the levetenant answered he would receive commands from no Captain save Captain Robertson, and so went out of guard. The ensigne the very same way disobeyed the Captain, with the aggravation that he wrapped the roll up

and put it in his pockett when the Captain desired it."

This was shocking conduct, and fully justified extreme measures on the part of the "Captain" on duty. But he, "partly from ane uncommon spirit, and partly from a compassion to the exceeding folly" of the two insubordinates, was "willing to pass from what the law of arms would have advised for curbing the insolence of such notorious offenders." So he went calmly to the Lord Provost's house, "who being in bed, desired the Captain, by his lady, to gett sentries from the Captain of the Guard," which was a ready way out of the difficulty. But, in the meantime, the "levetenant and ensigne sent out sentries, and the levetenant went off from the guard with such of the neighbourhood as he could persuade to go with him, but the ensigne stayed sometime longer to show his art in counteracting the Captain, and frustrating the very design of keeping guard."

This was too much, and, therefore, the Society laid a formal complaint before the Council on the just plea that "no Government can subsist without order and discipline," and that the atrocious conduct of the rebellious officers had "wounded the policy and government of this burgh in its very vitals, which is not to be cured but by some exemplary punishment, and cutting off such gangrened members." The indictment is a long and severe one, and it so affected the Council, that, we learn by the record of an Act which followed, they reprimanded the offenders, suspended them from office, and declared the "Levetenant" as "incapable of all publick trust within this city, during the Councill's pleasure."

At other times, we find the Society "extruding" members for various offences against the rules of their order. One Captain Walter Orrok, we find, had been guilty of "rood behaviour" to the Commandant. He was not expelled, but "the Society did appoint him to ask pardon of the Commandant, the Society to drink to Captain John Murray (the Commandant) in a moderate glass of wine." Whether the piper had to be paid by Captain Walter Orrok, history sayeth not.

During the rebellion of '45 the Trainbands seem to have disappeared, and there is an hiatus in their records until 1747, when a new set of Captains was appointed. Thereafter the Society became more and more a convivial one, and

keeping guard seems to have become a mere formality.

What they never failed to do, however, was to keep the King's and Queen's birthdays with proper loyalty.

Here, for instance, is a quaint record of the fourth of June, 1764 :

"Being the anniversary of His Majesty's birthday, the Society of Captains, at the desire of the Lord Provost, went from the Goldsmith's Hall to the Parliament House, where his Lordship, with the Lord High Commissioner, the Magistrates and Councilmen, nobility and gentry, etc., drank His Majesty's health, the Queen and Royal Family, etc., etc. In the evening there was an elegant supper at Sommers', where the Commandant and Society of Captains entertained the Lord Provost and Magistrates with that elegance and ease so peculiar to that Society. This evening, a little scuffle happened between the City guard and a few idle boys; but by the tender care and diligence of the Lord Provost, the evening was concluded without any disturbance, and the Society spent the night with the utmost happiness."

We have not the menu, but this was the bill on that occasion :

Supper, jelees and sileybubs	£2	2	0
2 doz. and 7 botts clerat	5	8	6
2 doz. and 11 botts punch	1	5	0
6 botts Madeira	1	1	0
Bread and beer	0	3	0
Porter	0	2	0
Cups	0	4	0
4 botts negus	0	5	0
Apples, oringes, resins, and almons	0	7	6
Prans	0	2	6
Cook and biskets	0	1	6
Cadies	0	1	6
Servants' of officers' drink	0	2	0
	£11	6	0
Waiters	0	5	0
	£11	11	0

Certainly a moderate sum for such a big entertainment; but, then, a sovereign in these old days went a very great deal further than we can make one go now.

The Captains must have been famous entertainers in the last half of the last century. Their suppers or dinners are always superb, conducted with "that elegance and ease so peculiar to the Society," characterised by "grate joy," or "much friendship and mirth," and ending with "propriety." The clerk never fails to record that at the time to go to quarters "the corps retired in distinct divisions, and in excellent order."

We must not leave the minutes and the clerks without one remarkable illustra-

tion. The following entry occurs in 1782, and is signed by the lieutenant-colonel, and not, as was usually the case, by the clerk :

"In order to render the minutes of the Society of Captains in future intelligible, and to prevent disputes in the corps with regard to precedent, it is proposed that no person can be elected clerk to this corps without having previously given proof of his acquaintance with grammar and orthography, and being a legible penman, as many inconveniences have been experienced by such deficiencies."

A most laudable resolution, but coming rather too late to be of much use. For it was passed in 1782, and in 1795 the alarm of a French invasion caused the enrolment of the Royal Edinburgh Volunteers. In 1798, the Magistrates suspended the appointment of officers to the Train-bands, and in that year, therefore, the ancient City Guards terminated what had for long previously been only an honorary existence. But, in 1848, the Town Council revived the office of Commandant and Captain of the Orange Colours, and to this day they annually make the appointment for the arduous duty named at the outset of this article.

KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.
BY ESMÈ STUART.

Author of "*Muriel's Marriage*," "*Joan Fellacot*," "*A Faire Damzell*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"A MARRIAGE IS ARRANGED."

HOEL was now really convalescent; but he was still very weak. He had sustained slight internal injury from the fall from the quay, and that, besides the other danger he had passed through, had laid him low. Sickness is often represented as a time for mental reflection; but more often it is passed in a vague round of thoughtlessness that takes possession of the brain, and a weary and profitless wondering.

May was approaching, and only now was the once keen-witted Hoel Fenner able to lie on a couch in his bedroom, and slowly string a few consecutive ideas together. Sister Marie was still with him, and Hoel had quite decided that the Roman Catholic Church had done well in producing such an embodiment of all that was beautiful and womanly as the Sisters of Charity.

But Hoel had many other thoughts in his mind that, as he daily grew stronger, also became more settled and persistent.

These thoughts related to Jesse Vicary and to Elva. It was no good disguising the fact; he loved Elva now with the new love grown of absence, and perhaps, too—so contrary is man's mind—from the very fact that he had cut himself off entirely from her. A hundred times a day he would say to himself: "I will put this case of conscience before Sister Marie, and she will decide." But he had not done so, and now Sister Marie no longer sat up at night with him, and did not stay all day. Soon the doctor would pronounce him fit to return home—home, how ridiculous the word sounded!—and the delightfully simple remarks of this French Sister could no longer be listened to.

"Vicary would be a good conscience-holder," he thought; "but then how can I ever see him again without telling him the truth; and how can I tell him the truth and bring ruin upon Elva? Elva—Good Heavens, what a fool I have been! Why did I run away like that? But what is done is done. She despises me, and I cannot defend myself, even though any gentleman would approve my conduct. Ah, would there be some adverse opinion? Are we able to judge any one with a right judgement? Is not even common law often administered most unjustly?"

"If I have been right by myself, have I not deliberately chosen to be unjust to Vicary in order to save myself the pain of forcing justice upon another? Hang it all, is there justice anywhere? Don't we, most of us, accept a justice with a smiling face? Are not some rules of society monstrously unjust, but custom makes them just? Can one pretend to do more than keep one's own hands clean? I have done that. Well, I shall go back to London as soon as ever I can travel, and just see what turns up. But with Elva—no, I must put away that thought."

At this moment Auguste the waiter came in with "Mistère Fennère's" morning paper, and the first thing his eye alighted on was:

"A marriage is arranged between the Honourable Walter Akister, only son of Lord Cartmel, the well-known astronomer, and Miss Kestell, eldest daughter of Mr. Kestell of Greystone. The wedding, we understand, is to take place early in May, at Rushbrook."

Hoel flung the paper away. Had he

been strong enough he would have stamped upon it. A rage new and altogether foreign to his nature seized him; more overwhelming because he could not blame either Walter Akister or Elva. Blame them—how could he? What must she have thought of him? Why, she thought so badly of him that she had been able to turn her love into hatred, and trample out her sweetest womanhood.

Then, after a few minutes he felt angry with Elva for thinking badly of him. To be prepared to marry that Walter Akister seemed worse than folly; it was a crime. It was like a woman to be inconstant, fickle, shallow, and so on, through all the usual and well-worn invectives against women, till his common sense reasserted itself, and he saw plainly that such conduct as his—unwilling though it had been—was enough to quench any woman's belief in any man—enough, and more than enough.

Weak as he was, Hoel rose from the couch, and grasping the support of the mantelpiece, stood trying to calm himself. He had fancied he had cooled himself into indifference, and that his illness had taken away all mad regrets. They had never been mad till now. Only now did he appear to realise his loss, only now, when Elva had promised herself to another.

He leaned against the marble, and felt angry with his weakness, and angry with the fate that had brought such misery upon him, and at that moment Sister Marie entered with her quiet, peace-suggestive ways, that seemed to repudiate any stormy human passion.

"Monsieur is standing, he has the strength to-day. That is because I asked Saint Joseph."

"Saint Joseph! Pshaw! It is because that woman I told you of, Sister Marie, is faithless, and is going to marry another man."

"You must rejoice greatly, as you told me it was not her fault."

"Rejoice! I do no such thing; I am very angry. She has no business to love twice. Besides—besides, I love her more than ever, just when I had fancied myself cured."

"We all have to tread the Rue de l'Enfer."

"Tread it, yes, when we have paved it first; but what do you think of treading it when one has tried to be an honourable man all one's life, when one has only done what is right, and then the misfortunes

of the wicked overtake one? The world is a place of injustice."

"Ah, monsieur, it is the intentions we forget; some of our deeds are beautiful, but the intentions beneath are very adverse to God. The intention is oftener self than God."

"I have done my duty for my own sake? Honestly, it is a pity that this reason of self-love does not exist often, if the result is good."

The good little Sister was not going to argue with a man so thoroughly out of sorts as Hoel.

"You are very good to tell me your trouble," she said, meekly.

"No, I did it with a bad purpose," he said, with half a smile. "Really, you good people can have no earthly peace. Just now my purpose is to get back to England and leave this dreary place—no offence; but, good Heavens! this has been a weary time; I never realised so fully before what I had gone through. When may I go?"

"Monsieur le Docteur will tell us. If monsieur goes back to trouble, he will think of us with pleasure sometimes."

"With pleasure? With envy."

"Monsieur must have duties in his country. He will have some mistakes to rectify, some love to give back. How much happiness the good God allows us to give!"

"To give, and very little to receive."

"We cannot give without receiving; but monsieur is so clever, he knows all this better than I can tell him. It is such a simple rule, a trite result, that never disappoints one."

"I don't know it," said Hoel, crossly, sinking wearily back upon his couch. "I never remember doing anything for the simple reason of giving and expecting nothing back. Honestly, there are few human beings—outside dwellers in convents—who do that; and these I fancy—"

"The convent walls do not make all hearts tender, monsieur; it is God. He can work as well in the world as in the cloister. Here is a good thought: He is doing good always, all day long, even when we do nothing to help Him."

"I never have done good. Well, perhaps, I tried to help a young man I met; but at last I did him an injury."

"And you will go back and repair it."

"If I repair that injury I shall bring sorrow into another household."

"Heaven answers such questions, mon-

sieur, we have but to go straight on. Ah! but you know all that better than I can do. It is a rule in earthly things as well as in heavenly matters."

"I thought I acted honourably," said Hoel, half to himself; "and yet, perhaps, after all, poor Vicary's right comes first. But does it? And Elva! Ah, now she will marry another man, have I not even less right to— Yes, that's it; fool that I was. I had everything in my own hands, and rejected it, and now—now it is taken from me. It will soon be no longer my secret to keep or to publish; it will be more sacred, and yet— Look here, Sister Marie, you are a saint, if there is a reality to that word, tell me, honestly, with all your little tables of right and wrong, composed like a calendar of the year, tell me what is right?"

"Suppose a young man exists who has been wronged, grievously wronged by one who is now on the verge of the grave; suppose—are you listening and tabulating?—suppose a third person knows this, and that he would, he must spare the old man at the expense of the younger man, who is hale and strong and will live many a long year yet; ought not the third person to consider age before youth? I have put it plainly."

"Where there is a wrong to be righted the duty is easy, monsieur. Go and right it. It does not take long to say."

Hoel did not answer; but he was not quite so happy in his former decision as he had been. Everything had appeared so plain to him when he fled away from England, and now nothing seemed right. He himself was out of his own reckoning; and, further, he was tormented lest this new idea should have sprung from the shock of reading of Elva's engagement.

If he sacrificed her father now, it would look like spite; it would, perhaps, be something much like disappointed jealousy. Positively Hoel, who had never had doubts about himself or his own course of action, now was tortured by doubt. That ridiculously simple Sister of Charity was like a single dahlia—truth was much more like the highly-folded complex dahlia—its petals were to be so easily reckoned up. Right and wrong were abstract terms, which only simpletons made simple. To right some men was to wrong others; all pure chance, a lottery, an uncertain toss-up.

No, he could not escape the consequences at all events, that was certain. Elva had changed. How she had been able to consent

to marry Walter he could not understand, and the fact was torture to him. Still, he could not blame her. It was too late now to change his path of action ; he had taken it, believing it to be honourable and the only one possible. Why should another way suddenly start into view and wind upward clearly in sight ? Not a smooth and pleasant way, perhaps ; but not altogether so devoid of nobility as he had fancied.

Behind all this, and in spite of that horrid paragraph, "a marriage is arranged," came the certainty that Elva was his superior, and that now he dared not go to her and say : " Because of the sin of another I forsook you." He remembered some of her remarks ; worse, her novel, the book he had so much despised, "An Undine of To-day" ; in that she had struck the key-note of her belief in a personal honour, a code greater, more large-minded, more unselfish than he had entertained, and he had then thought it absurd. To feel utterly at sea with oneself and one's principles is not cheering to low spirits. From beginning to the end, Hoel now saw he might have acted differently. Why had not he done so ?

By the evening Hoel had worked himself feverish, and was angry because he was so weak. Sister Marie only smiled quietly. He could have thrown half his books at her head.

This new impatience was a good sign—though Hoel thought it an extraordinary madness. He despised impatience as womanish and contemptible.

"Look here, Sister Marie, I am going as soon as you get that doctor to look in and say I shall not be doing a foolish thing. I seem to have made so many mistakes lately, as well avoid another."

"We will ask him to-morrow. And you have decided to go and—undo the wrong thing, monsieur ?"

"I have decided nothing. I shall see what turns up. Nothing really matters now. I've told you before, if not, I tell you now, I was a fool, a downright fool ; I fancied that a woman loved me, and now I find I'm the sufferer. I love her infinitely more than she can understand. She is going to marry another man, whilst I—it's strange, Sister, but true—I would not take another in her place for the gold of the Indies."

"It is again of your own happiness you are thinking ; why not think of hers first ? That other man will make her happy, be satisfied with that ; your great love for her is capable of bearing that trial."

"No," said Hoel, savagely, for his newly-developed temper was, it seemed, in constant request—"no, it is not capable of this. Pray speak plainly, you quiet saints are in no ways chary of the truth. You think me even more selfish than I was before."

"One does not become a great scholar without years of labour, nor very unselfish without learning. Monsieur thinks it too easy to learn."

"Easy ! easy ! I don't think it easy ; I tell you plainly, it's impossible. I can't be resigned to my—my darling's marrying that conceited coxcomb—no, that is what he thinks me. But, anyhow, he's a unlicked cub. There, anything you like."

Hoel used the good Sister as a safety-valve.

"Anyhow, I shall go next week. I may as well attend the wedding, and be unselfish," he added, in bitter irony.

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